FIRE & VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Banff National Park Prescribed Burn Program

Red Deer River Valley, Spring 2005

Fire has played an important role in maintaining the Rocky Mountain landscape for thousands of years. This spring, Banff National Park will be conducting a prescribed burn in the lower Red Deer River Valley. A prescribed burn is planned and managed by fire specialists.

Reintroducing fire to this valley will serve three purposes: improve wildlife habitat, restore historic vegetation patterns and reduce the threat of future wildfires from spreading outside the park.

The Red Deer River Valley

The Red Deer River Valley contains the largest area of flat, lower subalpine forest in the park, outside of the Bow Valley. Prescribed burning in this area will create openings in the forest canopy, recycle nutrients, and renew bighorn sheep and grizzly bear habitat. The burn is vital to restoring vegetation to more historical types when fire naturally swept through the area every 85 to 130 years.

Where Will the Burn Be?

The burn unit encompasses 2000 ha, of which 50-60% is likely to be burned. It is located adjacent to the park's east boundary, about 20 km west of the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch and 51 km north of Lake Minnewanka.

When Is It?

The main burn is planned for May 1 - June 30. A typical spring burn window allows for seven ignition days over a two-month period. Some preparation work including guard burning and burning forest fuels around facilities will be conducted in March and April as conditions allow.

Why Burn in the Spring?

New plant growth regenerates faster after a spring burn than in the summer or fall. It is not unusual to see wildlife feeding on the new growth within weeks of a spring burn.

Spring burns also produce fewer smoke impacts. Fewer temperature inversions at this time of year allow smoke to vent upward better, rather than being trapped closer to the ground. Forest fuels are still relatively wet in the spring and smoulder less, producing less smoke.

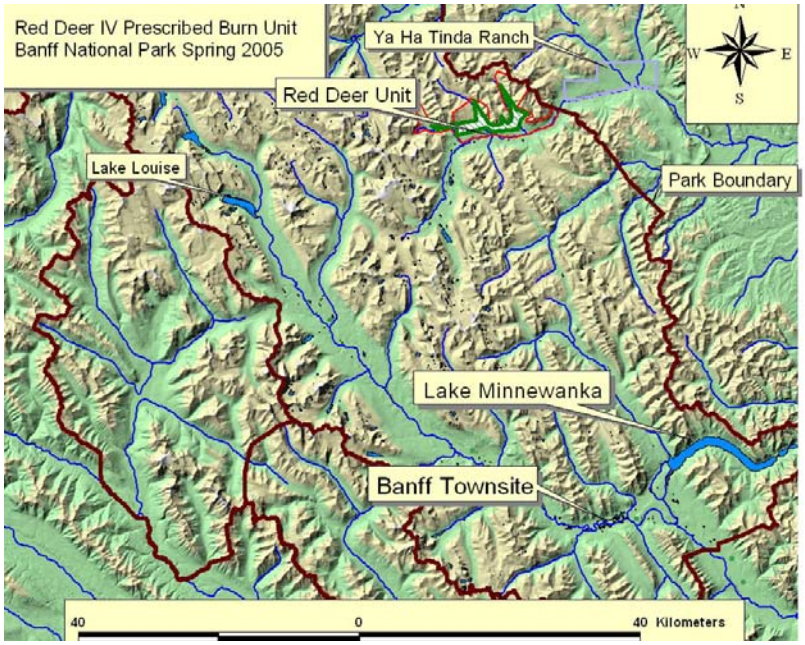
Large parts of spring fires typically self-extinguish overnight because forest fuels are still moist from winter snow and precipitation. June rains also normally extinguish any remaining smouldering. In the event that June is a dry month, a contingency plan is in place to treat any fire activity that persists into the summer.

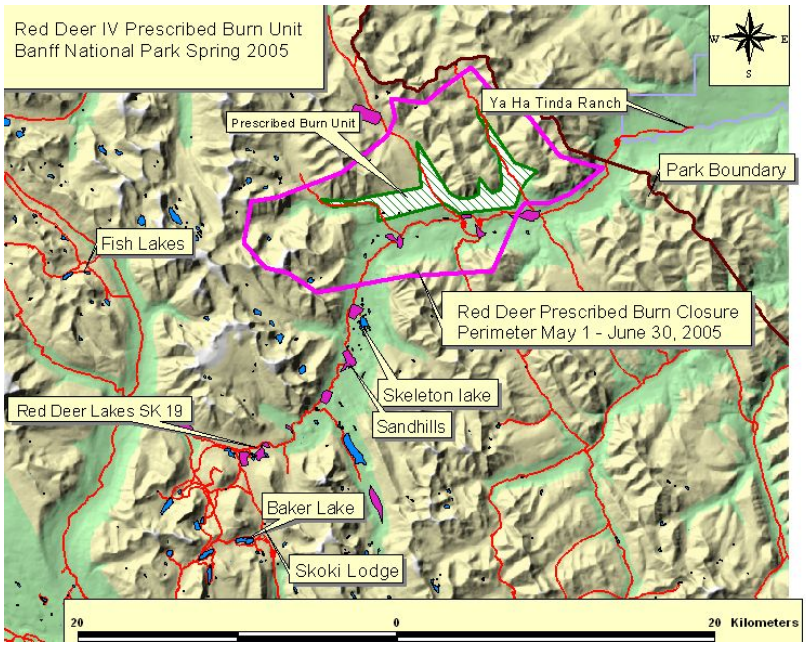
Impacts

There will be some temporary area and trail closures and smoke as a result of the prescribed burn.

High-level smoke may extend eastward towards the Sundre area. If typical spring weather conditions prevail, smoke should not vent into the Bow Valley.

Parks Canada has a smoke notification list for those who are extremely sensitive and would like advance warning of ignition days. Please call (403) 762-1447 to be included on this list.





Controlling Fire

Fire is primarily contained by natural barriers such as rocky ridges, alpine tundra, areas of wetter forest fuels, and by recent burns. To keep fire from spreading outside desired areas, fire guards will be created.

Firefighters and helicopters will be on site to monitor all burning. Additional resources will be on standby to assist with control as required.

A major benefit of this project is the creation of breaks in forest fuels that provide wildfire protection to neighbouring lands.

Parks Canada places the highest priority on safety and will only implement prescribed burns when the appropriate conditions are met.

Parks Canada appreciates your continued interest in these projects. For more information, visit the website at www.pc.gc.ca/banff or contact a Parks Canada Fire Information Officer at (403) 762-1447 or (403) 762-1464. Please submit any comments you may have to:

Superintendent, Banff National Park, P.O. Box 900, Banff, Alberta T1L 1K2.

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